SPRING IS NEAR
Are your bees ready? Are YOU ready?

For many years, I have taught that success in beekeeping is a result of both bees and beekeeper being READY at the beginning of our major nectar flow, which in Central Maryland is quite early, about April 15th. In spite of my writings and talks, often the bees have not built to strength for heavy nectar collection because the beekeeper did NOTHING to aid them. Further, the beekeeper does not have his equipment ready for installation prior to April 15th, or more particularly, just does not have enough equipment built and painted to install before the bees decide they are too crowded and make swarming plans. If the bees can PLAN AHEAD, why can't educated people who have calendars, TV weather reports, and "learning" brains do likewise? Then, for some of us who do plan ahead, we have to hear all these devious excuses of the NON-PLANNERS that their bees swarmed because of the high May temperatures, or that their bees died from resistant mites to Apistan that they had installed on Labor Day in early September, or that the severe cold of December and January had weakened their bees, or the sunspots on the moon, or the new Bush administration, or El Nino, or 1000 other WRONG excuses. The truth of the matter is they are not beeKEEPERS, just beeHAVERS who have not earnestly tried to learn. If that were not so, how is it that most Master Beekeepers rarely lose many bees and usually have a good honey crop?

I checked my bees, INSIDE THE HIVE, just after I returned from the American Beekeepers Federation meeting on January 19th, found queens had started to lay eggs, and put a gallon of 1:1 sugar syrup on each colony to entice the worker bees to clean and polish more cells for the queen to lay eggs. I also added several ounces of BeePro, a pollen substitute to the tops of brood frames. On January 31st, while Mr. Greenspan was cutting short term interest rate by a half a point, the temperature was 54¡, so I was out REVERSING my brood chambers and making more detailed hive inspections. All my marked queens are still alive, so I know that none of my new September queens have been replaced. I will check them again after Feb. 15th on the first day the temperature exceeds 55º to see if they need REVERSING again, and, of course, continue the 1:1 sugar syrup feeding. During February and March, I will clean and de-propolize frames for my supers, because it is so EASY when the frames are COLD, melt down some bad or old comb, install new plasticell foundation in some frames, repair hive bodies with auto body repair putty and repaint, renail any loose nails in hive bodies, and have all ready for use by April 1st. I have to have 5 supers, each containing 9 frames, ready for each colony. That is easy, and my radio will keep me entertained while I work. The hard work is cleaning up my workshop when the cleaning and repair work is done. My wife, sons, and grandchildren will extract the honey before July 4th, bottle it, and have it ready for sale at the Montgomery County Fair in early August. When you are OLD and stroke disabled, I get help from my family with all that boring work and leave the exciting FUN work of "keeping bees" for myself to do.

Where is your left over Apistan? When did you last requeen? Have you got at least 4 supers for each colony? Have you spare foundation on hand? Are you prepared to NOT use gloves, since they just cause more stinging? Have you thought about preparing entries for the county FAIR? Have you studied any more about diseases, bee behavior, swarm control, and

honey preparation so that you can sell at a high price or give a fine GIFT? I thought you wanted to be a true beeKEEPER rather than just a beeHAVER!

Speaking of Apistan: The Apistan strip is impregnated with 10% fluvalinate, which is the active miticide. Fluvalinate is damaged (made impotent) by both sunlight and heat, and there is no Viagra pill to fix it. If you have left unused strips in the light for very long or exposed to excess heat, the strips are probably of little value. I keep my strips in their closed box in my freezer until want to use them. Some people have claimed that their mites are resistant to Apistan and started to use the very dangerous CheckMite.If the truth were known, some of them had used unprotected Apistan and could have had excellent results with new, protected Apistan 1strips. If your queen is more than a year old, particularly Carniolan, LOOK OUT FOR SWARMING! My bees make an average honey crop of about130 lbs. each year in April and May which fills 3 Illinois supers. However, if I did not install 4 or preferably 5 supers all at one time to hold all that THIN, WATERY NECTAR that the bees collect before they evaporate the water out of it to ripen it into honey, they would have SWARMED due to lack of storage space. Get 5 supers of DRAWN COMB (NOT FOUNDATION) on your colonies by about April 15th. Unless you are a surgeon, you can survive for a day or two with a swollen finger from a bee sting, and this will start your sting immunity process. There is almost no excuse for wearing gloves. Gloves can carry disease from one colony to another, the smell of been venom in the glove alerts other bees that they may have to aid in defense of their hive from your intervention, and you can't pick up the queen to mark her or move her without injury if you are wearing gloves. A farmer can cut his finger when sharpening a tool, a gardener can get thorns in his fingers when picking berries, and a fisherman can get a fish hook stuck in his finger; and you can easily handle bees without stings when using bare hands, and a sting is surely not a broken leg. Just "how good" is your honey, your bottling, or your name if your honey is NOT entered in the county FAIR to compete against others? Many of us have competed and won many ribbons and prises so that our name and honey is known and respected, so we are easily able to sell our honey for a minimum of $3.50-$4.00 per pound, and many of us run out of saleable honey. If you have something that is well known and respected, customers will hunt for you, and pay higher prices because it is something "special". A Cadillac won't get to the beach any faster than a Chevrolet and it costs twice as much,but there are still many Cadillac's sold every year! Don't you think that you should "get off your butt", and plan on entering your honey in the county FAIR this August? Many of you have seen me at the county FAIR opening bee colonies in a screen cage while wearing only shoes, shorts, Tee-shirt and NO VEIL, finding the queen and picking her up, placing her on my arm or chest, she crawls around my arms, face, or chest while "looking for home", and worker bees come to be with her, but I rarely get stung even though I do this 4 times a day for 9 consecutive days! I make these demonstrations without a veil ONLY to attract attention so I can tell the audience how important honey bee pollination is to HUMAN food supply; BUT I strongly believe that everyone should wear a veil when they open a hive! At EAS this past August, many of you saw Dr. Norm Gary, who puts over a 100 bees in his closed mouth and releases them one-at-a-time and never gets stung. Both of us have a good understanding of BEE BEHAVIOR, which is the principle subject of Chapter 8 of The Hive and Honey Bee. Have you failed to read this 1300+ page "bible of beekeeping", or skipped over Chapter 8 as "too boring", and went quickly to that chapter about "how to produce more honey"? You will never find the real JOYS of BEEKEEPING until you understand BEE BEHAVIOR;

and maybe you let this winter pass right by without READING and STUDYING Chapter 8 during these past 3 months. SHAME ON YOU!

Recently, one of our members asked me "Is February or March the best time for "the spring treatment" of Apistan?" I knew that her bees had been treated in October and November, so I asked her "Why do you want to treat them in the spring? How do you know that they have mites?" This was her answer: "Everybody on the INTERNET keeps mentioning 'the spring treatment', and I just assume that my bees have mites." Has the Internet become the new dictionary, encyclopedia, medical textbook, and bible? Any uninformed person, jerk, or trouble maker can use the internet, and some people accept their statements as if "cast in stone". Yet we have books, articles, and research papers written by apiculturists, researchers, scientists, extension agents, and master beekeepers; and we have the meetings of EAS, ABF, MSBA, and our own MCBA, all of which feature known bee authorities, but the INTERNET soundings seem to take preference over all the teachings of people skilled in knowledge about apis mellifera. On the same day, another member called me about the use of essential oils that he had read about on the Internet. That was too much for me in one day and I exploded, and asked him a very simple question: "If the essential oils are really successful, why don't you think all of our well paid government research scientists as well as university scientists working on grant moneys would publish that information and we could get rid of Apistan, menthol, formic acid, and CheckMite? Did you know that the Beltsville scientists worked on essential oils for over 10 years and quit, because the results could never be duplicated." Being one of the scientists on the Manhattan Project developing the bombs we dropped on Japan, I am certainly glad that we did not have the Internet then, because maybe every Tom, Dick, and Harry would have been trying to make an atomic bomb in their garage. I am not condemning the INTERNET, I have a computer and put the PINK PAGES on it by request of many groups both here and abroad, but I do FIND FAULT with those people who take the easy way and believe what they like to believe, or the cheaper way, if it on the Internet rather than take accept the wisdom, years of study, and hard work of honey bee scientists, researchers, and apiculturists. Shucks, maybe you would except the advice of your local butcher about spaying your female puppy rather than have the service of a veterinarian. I have just proved to all the readers of the PINK PAGES that I could never be either a politician or a preacher, because I believe that all things are either black or white, but never gray.

Where was I? Oh, yes, when to use Apistan (for the umpteenth time). Scientists have shown that the female varroa mite lays new mite eggs ONLY in a cell with a honeybee LARVA! Hence, if Apistan is used in October and November when a queen bee is laying FEW eggs or NO eggs, this is the prime time for Apistan to kill close to 100% of all the mites in the colony, and there be very little chance of the colony developing many mites until the queen bee is heavily laying eggs, e. g., April, May, And June. However, this is NOT true if you installed Apistan in September and removed it in mid October, because the queen bee was still laying some eggs then, and the female mites could lay mite eggs with bee LARVA. If the bee scientist's time of Apistan use is followed, then there will be no need for a spring Apistan treatment. When you get a yearly physical exam, the doctor TESTS your temperature, TESTS your blood pressure, listens (TEST) to your heart, and might even TEST your urine. A 1 day sticky board TEST is done on my bees on April 15th and again on July 1st; and they have never needed a treatment for Varroa mites in April, and only once in July. MAKE A NOTE! The point is NOT when to treat, but

whether treatment is needed at all! Using medicine when it is not necessary is just BUILDING a RESISTANCE to that medicine, so when it is really needed, it does NOT work! Perhaps I can bring a sticky board to our next meeting and explain its use to you. You can make your own sticky board, or buy Brushy Mountains #260, Dadant's #M0036, or Mann Lake's #DC680, all priced at $4.50. TEST! TEST! TEST! Don't just treat when the bees don't need treatment, or just because someone on the Internet said "Now is the time for Varroa treatment". Use your own brain - that is why God gave it to you.

Perhaps this is a good place to mention some fairly new research that is being strongly endorsed by one of our well-known bee scientist, Dr. Dewey Caron. It is called IPM, the abbreviation for INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT. At a later date, I will give you a detailed PINK PAGE about IPM, but I will just pass on the basic principle behind IPM at this writing. All living things, including both you and I, have disease germs on our bodies or in our bodies, but they are not of sufficient number to make us ill or die. As long as we eat healthy food, get proper exercise, and live in a healthy environment, we might live to be 100 years old and feel good most of the time so that we enjoy a high quality of life. We live under these conditions without taking any medicines to kill all of the germs, and our body tolerates this smaller number. This is the exact principle that is formulated in the use of grease patties for the population CONTROL of the tracheal mite, acarapis woodi, discovered by Dr. Diana Sammataro, the author of the famous BEEKEEPER'S HANDBOOK that we use as our short course textbook. It is NOT necessary to KILL 100% of all the mites in a colony to maintain it as a healthy productive colony year after year. It is only necessary to kill enough mites that the disease fighting agents of the bees own body can maintain the health of the bee, so that the use of chemicals or other medicines can be greatly reduced or hopefully even negated. Yes, this might turn out to be labor intensive, maybe expensive, maybe too complicated for some beekeepers, but if IPM can be developed so that our bees just don't die unless we treat them with harsh chemicals, it will be worth the effort. I have high hopes that we can create enough collaboration between the bee scientists and bee breeders to develop bees of greatly increased HYGIENIC BEHAVIOR, so that no chemicals or very few chemicals will have to be used in beekeeping. However, the time is NOW, and NOW, we still have both the tracheal mite and the Varroa mite, in almost every county of 49 of our 50 states, and chemicals HAVE to be used and used at the correct times and dosage when needed, or you have DEAD BEES. In my 69th year of beekeeping, I have had to use far more chemicals in the past 15 years to keep my bees healthy than I had to use in the first 50+ years. Hopefully, our scientists are going to change that soon. It is OFF THE SUBJECT, but you can help the industry and yourselves by buying queens and bees ONLY FROM BREEDER'S who are working with bees with proven HYGIENIC BEHAVIOR.

WELL, BACK TO THE SALT MINES: Your most important February task, if you want a big honey crop, is REVERSING your brood bodies that encourages queen laying and aids swarm prevention. I discussed this strongly in the January Pink Pages, and I want to emphasize that you just can't decide that you are going to reverse your brood one day next weekend when you are off from work, because if it is done at the wrong time, there is a strong possibility that much of the brood will become chilled and die. You MUST inspect the brood carefully and when you find the great majority of the brood in the UPPER frames to be OPEN brood (eggs and larva) and the LOWER frames to primarily be CAPPED brood and empty cells, that is the time

to switch. You might inspect on a weekend day, determine that reversing should not be done for another 3-4 days, dash home from work for a few minutes in the heat of the day, reverse, and do the same thing all over about 10-14 days later. If you brood bodies are deep hive bodies, you will probably have to make 2-3 reversals between now and May 1st; but if your brood bodies are medium (Illinois) super bodies, like mine, you may have to make 3-5 reversals before May 1st. However, if you want a large crop of honey and your queen is over a year old, you are probably going to have swarms, so be aware of that. I will demonstrate this at the next meeting, as well as bringing a sticky board for you to see. As I have said previously, you MUST have a strong population of forager bees at the nectar flow time in order to get a god crop of honey, and a strong population of bees is a major cause of swarming. This is like balancing a cup of hot coffee on one knee and a dish of cold ice cream on the other knee while eating your dinner. It your job to always keep empty laying space ABOVE the queen so that she always has empty laying space to move UP to, because bees are reluctant to push a queen DOWN in the early spring laying time, and you do this by REVERSING brood chambers. I must repeat here that you cannot decide to do reversing every other weekend, or every 3 weeks, or go by a calendar, or judge it by what day you reversed Hive Number 1; but it has to be done to each colony when the location of open brood in that particular colony indicates it is time to reverse. This is the best reason to write down notes about each colony as you inspect it, so you don't make stupid mistakes. I use a portable tape recorder, now well disguised by propolis, as I inspect. I am an OLD man and my memory is not what it used to be, and I'll bet many of you are the same. Your other major task in February is keep that 1:1 sugar syrup feed going, not only the stimulate egg laying, but keep the bees from starving because they are using tremendous amounts of food to feed all the new larvae. More Maryland bees die of starvation in MARCH than any other month, because of brood rearing, so don't slack up on the sugar syrup. You might start thinking about just how you are going to have a steady supply of water available for bees BEFORE THEY FIND THE NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR'S SWIMMING POOL. Bees have to have water to dilute the stored honey into something like nectar to feed the larvae, and once they select their supply point in the EARLY spring, you CAN'T CHANGE IT without great difficulty. Hence, start planning your water supply system in February when you are not TOO busy.

Although boring to some, there are enough new members that the PROPER use of foundation should be again described. FIRST OFF, FOUNDATION IS NOT DRAWN COMB AND ABSOLUTELY HAS TO BE USED UNDER A DIFFERENT SET OF CRITERIA! Making foundation into drawn comb is hard work for the bees and requires that they consume about 8 pounds of honey to get the energy to produce 1 pound of bees wax! Hence, bees will NOT build comb on foundation unless there is a strong nectar flow on, or you can use 1:1 sugar syrup as an artificial nectar. Why beeHAVERS and beginners can't understand that is a mystery to me, but so many bitterly complain that their bees just won't build foundation into drawn comb. Further, although the Carniolan race is my favorite bee, it is a lousy comb builder, whereas the Italian race is by far the best comb builder. You can't have several supers of foundation on a hive at one time, or they will make a gosh awful mess of the foundation with burr comb, brace comb, comb in bee space, and just a mess. You put a super of 10 (MUST be 10, not 9) frames on top of the upper brood box with NO queen excluder about April 1st, and keep checking it at least twice each week. When you find about 6-7 frames drawn rather well and "something" (nectar, pollen, or brood) in many of the cells, move the drawn cob frames to the outside position and the undrawn frames to the center, make sure that the queen is down below in the brood chambers,

and install a queen excluder. Now you have "baited" the super, so that bees will regularly come through the queen excluder, and it is now time to add another super of 10 frames of foundation and repeat the same as super #1 except you are not going to move the excluder and let the queen up there again. AFTER you get 10 frames of foundation drawn into comb in each super, then you can only use 9 frames in a super if you desire. In spite of what someone else might tell you, mixing drawn comb frames and frames of foundation in the same super usually results an awful mess in which you cannot recover the honey or use the foundation again. People ask me "What foundation do you like?" I use THIN SURPLUS on those frames making CUT COMB honey, and Dadant's Plasticell foundation on ALL other frames, both extracted honey frames and brood frames; and I am so pleased with Dadant's Plasticell, I wish it had been invented when I started in 1933 instead of just 20 years ago. It is wonderful and NO frame wiring is necessary. REMEMBER, you MUST have some kind of nectar flow going on, or bees will absolutely NOT draw foundation! After you have gone to all this trouble to get foundation drawn into comb, for golly sake, protect it from wax moths after you extract and store it for the winter. Use only para-dichloro-benzene to kill wax moths, never napthalene which is used in most moth balls.

George W. Imirie
Certified Master Beekeeper